



## St. Bridget's School Real Melting Pot

Integration may be a red-hot issue some places, but at St. Bridget's School it is as normal as blueberry pie.

The lineup at what apparently is the oldest school building in the city of Rochester (it was built in 1854) sounds like a United Nations roll call.

**Bill Beeney**

"We have a real melting pot in the finest sense of the word," said the Rev. Francis Vogt, pastor of St. Bridget's Church and, as such, director of the school.

He was reviewing some of the parish's accomplishments and mentioning, not just in passing, that it is in the midst of a \$35,000 school remodeling project.

"We have 185 pupils now. About 55 per cent are Puerto Rican, 20 per cent are Negro. The rest? Well, in the last year we've had children who were born in New Zealand, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Mexico, North Africa, Ukraine, Austria, Italy, Cuba, Hawaii, plus several American Indian youngsters."

To carry the melting pot idea a step farther, consider this:

The housekeeper at St. Bridget's is a Mohawk Indian woman named Mrs. Elizabeth Kelly. She was born on a reservation. The custodian, father of 12 children, is a Puerto Rican, Anastasio Rivera.

The organist, Alexandra Salamaca, is Ukrainian. The assistant pastor, the Rev. Roger Baglin, is Irish. And Father Vogt is of German descent.

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WITH DOUBLED-UP classes in all rooms, the school is bursting at the seams. Back in the depression days of the 1930s when the child population dwindled, the upper floor of the school was closed off.

Only the five rooms on the lower floor have been used since, but now the demand is for more space. Father Vogt hopes to reopen the upper floor.

The character of St. Bridget's parish has followed the changing pattern of

Rochester's population. You can use it as an ethnic yardstick to measure the ebb and flow of cultures.

In 1854 Hand Street was in what was then known as "the Dublin District" of Rochester. Irish names predominated: Lennon, Tracy, Fitzgerald, Claffy, Mulholland, Leahy, Reilly, McCarthy, Clancy, Burns, McElroy, Coogan, Rafferty, Mildoon, Kearney, Duffy, Doyle, Dolan, Mulligan, McIntyre, O'Hare, Kennedy.

Later the area emphasis became Italian, more recently Puerto Rican.

When the Dubliners decided to build a church, they moved swiftly. A group met April 21, 1854. On May 8 the lot was purchased for \$25. On June 11 the cornerstone was laid. On Nov. 5 the completed church, a small brick building, was dedicated.

The pews were purchased from a Methodist church in Fitzhugh Street. The pulpit was so small that when the preacher stood in it he could almost touch the ceiling. A barn in back of a house across the street was used as the first school.

When the present church was built in 1872-75, the old church became the present school. Four rooms were added in 1890. Graduates over the years have ranged from Bishop Walter A. Foery to Carol Taylor, a featured dancer in "West Side Story," and include numerous professional men.

The church survived many a lean year. It scrambled to make ends meet, as the Rev. Gerald T. Brennan noted in a historical review. Father Brennan, who wrote 13 widely acclaimed books for children, died in 1962 after serving as St. Bridget's pastor for 25 years.

"Various means were used to raise funds. Picnics, fairs and festivals were common. So were lectures by prominent speakers, tea parties and musicales." Father Brennan had a ticket to an 1857 function that tickled his fancy:

"Great festival and tea party . . . Exhibition of Wax Works and Cosmorama . . . and an extensive Display of Fire Works . . . for the benefit of St. Bridget's Church."